

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5796

S E C R E T GUATEMALA 0691

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, GT

SUBJECT: LAUGERUD GOVERNMENT AND EXTREME LEFT

REF: STATE 018399

1. THIS MESSAGE IN REPLY PARA 2 REFTEL. PARA 3 WILL BE
RESPONDED TO SEPARATELY AT LATER DATE.

2. STRONG INDICATIONS LEAD US TO BELIEVE THAT THE ACTIONS
OF GUATEMALAN SECURITY FORCES, AT LEAST IN CAPITAL CITY,
ARE CARRIED OUT WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF AND AT THE DIRECTION
OF PRESIDENT IN DEALING WITH SENSITIVE OR IMPORTANT MATTERS.
WHILE THERE IS SOMETIMES QUESTION AS TO WHETHER LOCAL
AUTHORITIES IN INTERIOR HAVE ACTED WITH ADVANCE APPROVAL
OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IN HANDLING POLITICAL CASES, PATTERN
SEEMS TO BE THAT ANY CASE IN GUATEMALA CITY INVOLVING
COMMUNISTS OR ALLIED GROUPS IS TAKEN TO PRESIDENT FOR
DECISION AS TO FINAL DISPOSITION. RECENT EVIDENCE SUGGESTS
HE EQUALLY INTERESTED IN, AND DETERMINED TO SUPPRESS, ANY
VIOLENT OR ILLEGAL ACTION BY TERRORISTS OF EXTREME
RIGHT. OCCASIONAL REFERENCES IN PRESS DURING CURRENT
ADMINISTRATION TO CONTINUED ACTIVITY BY "ESCUADRON DE LA
MUERTE" ARE, WE BELIEVE, INVENTIONS OF THE PRESS. EM,
WHICH UNQUESTIONABLY FUNCTIONED WITH OFFICIAL SANCTION
UNDER ARANA GOVERNMENT, HAS PROBABLY BEEN OFFICIALLY AND
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DELIBERATELY DISBANDED.

3. WE BELIEVE THERE IS MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO ADMINISTRATIONS IN INTENSITY AND STYLE OF THEIR HANDLING OF EXTREME LEFTIST GROUPS. REPRESSIVE ACTION BY CURRENT GOVERNMENT IS NOT RPT NOT ON AS REGULAR, AUTOMATIC, ORGANIZED BASIS AS UNDER ARANA. GOVERNMENT DOES NOT RPT NOT ARBITRARILY SELECT ITS TARGETS, BUT DEALS WITH THOSE IT CATCHES RED-HANDED. INDICATIONS ARE THAT EXTRA LEGAL ACTIONS BY SECURITY FORCES ARE NOW TIGHTLY CONTROLLED AND USED HIGHLY SELECTIVELY AND SO FAR MORE SPARINGLY. SECURITY FORCES HAVE BEEN DISCREET AND CIRCUMSPECT IN SOME CASES BUT NOT IN OTHERS. IN GABRIEL KIDNAPPING AFTERMATH, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE CONCEAL FULL EXTNET OF GOVERNMENT'SROLE EVEN HAD INFORMATION GIVEN NEWSPAPERMEN BEEN BETTER COORDINATED, AND IN FACT WHEN DEALING WITH A MAJOR COMMUNIST LEADER SUCH AS ALVARADO GOG DID NOT SEEM TO FEEL OBLIGED TO TRY VERY HARD TO CONCEAL ITS ROLE.

4. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT NUMBERS INVOLVED ARE GREATER THAN GENERALLY BELIEVED. TERRORIST GROUPS ARE QUITE SMALL AND WE BELIEVE NUMBER FALLING INTO GOVERNMENT HANDS IN ANY SIX MONTHS' PERIOD CAN BE COUNTED IN ONE OR TWO DIGITS. AS EMBASSY HAS REPORTED, LEGAL POLITICAL PARTIES ARE IMPRESSED WITH GREATER OPENNESS AND TOLERANCE OF CURRENT ADMINISTRATION AND DO NOT FIND THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAMPERED. FOR EXAMPLE, RECENT FOUR-WAY RACE FOR MAYOR IN MAZATENANGO, GUATEMALA'S FOURTH-LARGEST CITY, WAS VIGOROUS AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO CMPLAINTS OF ANY RESTRICTIONS ON CAMPAIGNING OR ABOUT FAIRNESS OF VOTE COUNT.

5. INFORMED GUATEMALANS ARE ABLE TO DISTINGUISH AMONG TARGETS OF SECURITY FORCES, BUT CRITICS, SUCH AS EDITORIAL WRITERS IN INDEPENDENT EL GRAFICO WHO CRITICIZED HANDLING OF GABRIEL KIDNAPPERS, BELIVE AS MATTER OF PRINCIPLE THAT TERRORISTS SHOULD BE TURNED OVER TO COURTS OR ALLOWED SLIP INTO EXILE. PRESIDENT AND TOP MILITARY LEADERS CLEARLY BELIVE SUCH A COURSE AT THIS TIME, IN LIGHT OF CONDITIONS IN THE COURTS, WOULD ONLY PROLONG EXISTENCE OF TERRORIST GROUPS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO FURTHER ACTIVITY.

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6. IN PRESENTING THIS ANALYSIS, EMBASSY IN NO WAY CONDONES OR EXCUSES GOG INTERNAL SECURITY POLICY AND TACTICS. OUR VIEWS ON PRACTICAL AND MORAL ADVANTAGES OF MAINTAINING LAW AS WELL AS ORDER HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED TO VARIOUS LEVELS OF GOG. BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT HOWEVER STRONG OUR CONCERN, THERE IS AT PRESENT NO WIDESPREAD GUATEMALAN CONCERN

PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, OVER GOG'S METHOD OF HANDLING
INTERNAL SECURITY; IN FACT PUBLIC CONCERN COULD
SWING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION IF TERRORIST ACTIVITY
SHOULD SPREAD AND GOVERNMENT SEEM TO BE INSUFFICIENTLY
ENERGETIC IN SUPPRESSING IT. GRAFICO'S GLOOMY
PREDICTIONS OF LOSS OF SUPPORT BY GOVERNMENT DUE TO
ANTI-TERRORIST ACTION HAVE LITTLE FOUNDATION AT THIS TIME.
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